Jesus Record Special - Soul to Soul

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The Jesus Record Special
Soul to Soul
Hosted by Chris Coppernoll
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Rich Mullins: What parades itself as piety often is nothing but pure doubt. What C. S. Lewis said, and what I've come to suspect is being very true, is, that the thing that is common, is the thing that is most like art. It's when a writer, when a painter, when a musician, is able to take that thing that you've always suspected and give it words, that's when you respond to it.

Announcer: You are listening to Soul to Soul, a weekly look at the people who make contemporary Christian music....

Mike Beck: Before he passed away last fall, Rich Mullins began work on what he called The Jesus Record. And now the project stands as his legacy to Christian music. Rich Mullins and The Jesus Record, next.

[Surely God Is With Us]

MB: Welcome to another edition of Soul to Soul. I'm Mike Beck, in this week for Chris Coppernoll. Each and every week you can find Soul to Soul on great radio stations like 99.7 KTSH Oklahoma City, OK, and 1340, WJYI, Milwaukee, WI.

MB: It hardly seems possible that it's been almost a year since the untimely and tragic death of Christian Music's Poet Laureate, Rich Mullins. In the weeks before he died, Rich recorded a demo cassette of nine new songs that were to appear on his first new project for his new record company, Myrrh Records. The project was to be called, The Jesus Record, a project that Rich said was "needed"-for himself and his friends. A friend recalled Rich saying, "These are the songs that I want to do, and this is what I want to say about Jesus." Although Rich is now gone home, to the place he so longed to be, the songs he left behind still speak with powerful voices. A group of Rich's close friends determined to complete his unfinished opus. They included Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, Ashley Cleveland, Phil Keaggy, and his longtime backup band, the Ragamuffins. This week we are featuring many of the songs from the new album. In a slight departure from our normal format, we've decided to step back and allow Rich to speak to you directly, in a manner of speaking, about the things that were so very important to who he was, and who he was

trying to be, in Christ. Here then, is the heart, and the musical legacy, of Rich Mullins.

[That Where I Am, There You...]

RM: I got a great lesson in humility. It was after my first album came out, an album that nobody bought, and that no one would play on the radio, and... I've always been a little arrogant, I think, about my own work. I'm kind of a fan of my own. I really do like my music. And I know that upsets people because they think I should be more humble, but I kinda go, it would be ridiculous for me to go to all the bother to write a song that I didn't like. So I'm not gonna pretend like, "Oh, gee, I dunno..." I really like my songs. I don't know that they're great songs, but I know I like them. But I was really kinda going, "Wow, nobody bought this album, what's wrong?" And I went, "Gee, I'm gonna start writing really cool stuff instead of trying to say what I think is important." And about the time that I was, right after my first album had totally bombed, and we were starting to work on a second album, and I was getting really serious about picking out songs, a friend of mine shot himself in the stomach. And I suddenly... and I remember very clearly, I was walking up a street that runs into Wheaton, IL. And I remember, I could tell you the spot where I was, when I finally figured out what this song... I had been playing this song for a long time. I generally write the accompaniment first, and then you just kind of drop a melody over the accompaniment so that it hangs nice. And then you... my thing with lyrics is that lyrics, lyrics are sort of like subtitles, you tell people who might not figure out what the song is about without the help of lyrics, what the song is about. Does that make sense? So anyway, suddenly I went, this song is not for any record, this song is not... this song is for this friend of mine, because he shot himself. Fortunately he didn't, wasn't very accurate about the way he shot himself, and he lived. But I thought, I've got to say something to him. And that's when I wrote, You're on the Verge of a Miracle. Which, then, ironically, became the first song that the radio people started playing in heavy rotation. And for a lot of people, they still will talk about, "Wow, that was your first radio success," "That was your first song that you had that went to Number One." For me that song is always a song that I wrote for this friend of mine who was so, in such a state of darkness, that I just...all I wanted to say to him was, hang on, because the light can break through. And, that was..and then after the success of that particular song, I felt somewhat ashamed for having thought about how can I write something very popular. And what I began to suspect, was that there were a lot of people who needed to know that they were on the verge of a miracle.

[My Deliverer-Ragamuffins]

RM: You know, I was talking to a friend of mine lately and he said, "I just don't like Christians." And he said, "I believe in Jesus, and I believe in all that stuff, I just hate hanging out with Christians." And I said, "Well, you and me are friends, and I'm Christian,"

and he said, "Yeah, you're different." And I said, "Well, I'll take that as a compliment, but I'm not sure what else you mean." And then I began to name several people that I knew that he knew that were Christians. And eventually what we came around to in the conversation was, what he didn't like was that he didn't really know most Christians. That a lot of the people that he went to church with alienated him, because they, all he knew about them was what they believed, what picket lines they were going to stand on, whether or not they were literalists in their interpretation of the Scriptures. They all had like a bunch of doctrinal positions, they were all very, like, I am a non-smoker, I am a tea-totaler, I am a whatever, they all knew their place on a number of moral issues. But none of them were able to communicate who they were to him. So they seemed very boring. And I can understand that. They seemed like non-people, they seemed like chess pieces. And I think that one of the things that is very threatening to many of us, is, we go, if people really knew me, they'd never believe in Jesus. And I kind of want to say, no, that's exactly wrong. That people will never come to know Jesus as long as we choose to hide ourselves. That until I can be vulnerable, until I can... and I don't think that that necessarily means that I need to go out and get on the radio and announce all of my private sins. I think that I can be very honest without being hurtful to people. You know what I mean is? But I think, yeah, I think that what will please God is if I have progressed toward being the person whose name is written on that white stone that He will give me.

[Heaven in His Eyes]

MB: I'm Mike Beck and you're listening to Soul to Soul. Thanks for spending some time with us. We are focusing on the ministry and the musical legacy of Rich Mullins as we feature music from the new project, The Jesus Record. Rich was not a man to mince words. He felt that many of the institutions and traditions that the church has created hindered more than advanced the cause of Christ, and he was not afraid to say so. We continue now with more candid thoughts from Rich Mullins.

RM: One criticism I would make of evangelical Christianity, is that it is marked by movements. You know, we had back in the Seventies, the Time Management Movement, that became very important. Then there was the Spiritual Gift Movement, and everyone got really interested in spiritual gifts. Then there was the, you know, Jesus Is Coming Again Movement. You know, we just hop from one new fascination to another, and never really get into the depths of any of them, and pretty much obscure the real meaning, and certainly, empty the real power of all these things that suggest greatness. Does that make sense? And I think that what we like, I think because, maybe more than ever before, twentieth-century people live without any identity. We live without any sense of being anything other than a consumer, other than something that needs. Other than something that has wants. I mean, many of us define ourselves in terms of sexual preference, we

define ourselves in terms of recreational preferences, you know what I mean is? Yeah, so who are you, what do you do, what do you like. We talk about ourselves in those kinds of terms. And I think that it's largely because we live on sensation, and we very seldom get beyond sensation, into anything that's really essential. And I think it's because we're afraid if we ever get past, if we ever get past this little shallow thing that we're playing out, that we're gonna find that there's nothing under it. I find that what parades itself as piety often is nothing but pure doubt. That it's really agnosticism dressed up in a lot of religious jargon.

[All The Way To Kingdom Come]

RM: Everybody thinks that writers sit around in this kind of perpetual fog of inspiration, and it's really just a fog of confusion. Sometimes it's a caffeine buzz - you never know exactly what it is. But we generally are not, I don't think most people I know who write, if you were to be serious with them, most people would not say, "Yes, God appeared to me and gave me this song." For me, my understanding of the way things work, is that after God made man, He told him to reproduce and be fruitful and multiply, which I think is a wonderful command that I'm not allowed to follow because I'm not married. But He also told us to subdue the universe, that we were to... and I don't think that He meant by that, to exploit it. I think that what He meant by that was that we were to try to create order out of chaos, that we were to try to organize things. The first job He gave Adam, interestingly enough, was the job of naming the animals. Which... and the word there for naming really means categorize, sort of. It kind of says, call out what they are. Tell me what these are. So, I think work is a very, very holy thing. And I take work very seriously. I think that most of us think that spiritual exercises are what you do once you get home from your work. But I think that what you do at your work is just as spiritual in your, you know, in that twenty minutes that you have set aside for reading Oswald Chambers or whatever. So for me, my songs are not a matter of something that God has given me. I am very thankful to God that He gave me ears, that He gave me parents who allowed me to take piano lessons, that He gave me some natural talent in the area of music. I'm very thankful to God that He gave me an environment to grow up in wherein I was taught to listen, wherein I was taught to appreciate things. And then, what I give Him back when I write a song like "When He rolls up His sleeves, He ain't just puttin' on the Ritz," that is my worship to Him. And I think He accepts it, not because it's great music - if you want to talk about great music, man, there was enough great music written by the time Bach died, that none of the rest of us ever needed to take up a pen and write a note. You don't write because the world has need of your music. You write because you have a need to make order, to organize things. And if you are a musician, you express that very human, very common need, by making music. If you're a baker, you do it by making bread. It's all the same goodness. It just expresses itself in different areas.

[Jesus]

MB: Michael W. Smith lent his considerable talents to the recording of The Jesus Record. He shared with us memories of his good friend:

Michael W. Smith: He was so unique. First of all, there was nobody like Rich, nobody even close to being like Rich. And he was a poet, which I think we have very few of, and... probably, it was just the way he thought and the way he lived his life, that I envied. All the time. And I know it's different that - things would be different if he'd had a family, and it's a little different because I'm a family guy. Rich was never married, and he lived on the Indian reservation. He had so very few personal belongings, I mean, he just didn't acquire anything. And I wanted to go live, I just always wanted to go do what Rich did, because he wasn't distracted. And... I'm gonna miss the songs. Because nobody wrote songs like Rich. And I miss... when I was with him, I never knew if he was gonna, like, say something totally bizarre - which he would all the time, he was always making us laugh - or say something so profound that you were speechless. And he did that a lot.

[You Did Not Have a Home]

RM: Someday we'll be called to give an account. And I don't think our crown will be the music we wrote, I don't think our crown will be the words we wrote. I think it will be how we have built up the body of Christ, how we have torn down walls of suspicion and walls of fear. How we have shed light on false doctrines, how we've been encouraging, on truth, those are the things I think - and how that affects lives. And how we made Jesus visible.

Announcer: You've been listening to Soul To Soul...

Transcribed by SandyMcMullen.

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